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SOME FACTORS IN WORKERS' DECISIONS TO FOREGO RETRAINING, PROGRESS REPORT OF A STUDY IN METROPOLITAN TORONTO. PAPER PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL SEMINAR ON ADULT EDUCATION RESEARCH (CHICAGO, FEBRUARY 11-13, 1968).

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TO DETERMINE HOW TO MOTIVATE ADULTS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ACADEMIC AND TECHNICAL TRAINING AVAILABLE TO THEM IN METROPOLITAN TORONTO, TWO GROUPS OF WORKERS WERE INTERVIEWED--27 APPLICANTS TO CANADIAN MANPOWER CENTRES WHO HAD REJECTED RETRAINING ("REFUSER" SAMPLE), AND 46 WHO HAD ACCEPTED BUT FAILED TO APPEAR AFTER THEY RECEIVED THEIR CALL-UP LETTERS ("NO-SHOW" SAMPLE). OF THE "REFUSER" SAMPLE, CRITICAL FACTORS FOR REFUSING WERE THE LENGTH OF TIME BEFORE TRAINING AND LACK OF MONEY. OF THE "NO-SHOW" SAMPLE, FEW REFERRED TO DESIRE FOR HIGHER INCOME, MOST SAW THE ADDITIONAL EDUCATION AS ASSURANCE OF REGULAR OR MORE DESIRABLE EMPLOYMENT, ABOUT HALF WERE UNWILLING TO MOVE FROM THE CITY FOR A JOB, AND NONE REFERRED TO DESIRE TO ACQUIRE SKILLS IN DEMAND BY EMPLOYERS. REASONS FOR NOT APPEARING INDICATE POOR COMMUNICATION, SUCH AS LANGUAGE DIFFICULTY. IT WAS RECOMMENDED THAT ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS BE MORE ADEQUATELY DESIGNED FOR EFFICIENT TRANSFORMATION OF WORKERS INTO STUDENTS BEFORE CREATING FURTHER DEMAND FOR RETRAINING. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL SEMINAR ON ADULT EDUCATION RESEARCH, CHICAGO, FEBRUARY 11-13, 1968. (PT)

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Some Factors in Workers' Decisions to Forego Retraining

Progress report of a study in Metropolitan Toronto

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The Department of Manpower and Immigration of the Federal Government and the Departments of Education of the indivdual provinces in Canada have been cooperating since 1961 in a massive training and re-training scheme for the unemployed.

This study began in response to a need for more information concerning methods of reaching adults and of motivating them to take advantage of the academic and technical training and re-training available to them. The data to be reported here are only a part of a larger study conducted in Metropolitan Toronto during the Spring and Summer of 1967. The study is, therefore, limited by locale, by seasonal factors, and by the specific urban area in which it was conducted. Consequently, the results are based on data which may now be out-of-date but the generalizations and methods should be of interest to those concerned with adult education generally. The success of the program in at least one locale not too far from Toronto is described in a January 27th newspaper item (Toronto Star, January 27, 1968) as follows:

> "WATERLOO - Students at the crowded Ontario Manpower Education Centre here will REALLY burn the midnight oil. There isn't enough room for them to study during the day.
>
> For the first time in Canada, adult retraining classes will be held around the clock beginning Feb. 15 with a new shift starting at 11 p.m. until 7 a.m.
>
> The school, built for 700 students, has 1,760 crammed in its courses."

2. The original proposal which was approved for funding under a cost-sharing agreement for research into manpower and retraining programs defined the purposes of this study quite simply:

To identify factors in the decisions of:

(a) unemployed, unskilled workers; and

(b) unskilled workers employed in "blind-alley" positions

to forego retraining for a higher level of skill.

3. The general hypotheseswere derived from a study of the literature concerning the motivations of workers and their attitudes toward retraining programs. These hypotheses describe both the kinds of variables which were to be studied and also indicate the complexity of the research strategy which was to be evolved.

...Continued page 2

They are as follows:

1. That ordinary mass media communications do not adequately convey the requirements for enrolment in the programs or the potential benefits;
2. That education, training, and work experience characteristics differ for those who enrol and those who reject retraining opportunities;

and 3. That a limited background of work experience in different jobs, or little acquaintance with the work situation of skilled workers, or little or no prior experience with any type of adult training or formal learning situation would serve as serious deterrents to enrolment in the re-training program.

In addition to these several attempts to vary types of communications were suggested, with a series of follow-up studies designed to examine actual behavior of those exposed to different types of messages or appeals.

4. Methodology

1. Two alternative approaches to defining an appropriate sample for study had to be examined. First, there was the possibility of drawing samples from the ranks of the unemployed and from jobs which could be identified as being "blind-alley" or "dead-end". A considerable amount of reflection, however, suggested that both of these groups might contain only a small number of individuals who were candidates for the study - that is, among all of the unemployed in a Metropolitan area of the size of Toronto, of approximately 1,800,000 (with an unemployment figure of approximately 4.5% or 50,000 individuals) it might be extremely expensive and time consuming to use any systematic sampling procedure which would yield workers who

not only knew about retraining possibilities, but who had also consciously rejected enrolment in the available courses. As for the workers in blind-alley jobs the design is confounded by the problem of the worker's perception of the future of his job. If he believes that his total occupation may cease to exist this might lead to different behavior vis á vis retraining, than if he believed only that his current employer might change.

The second alternative was to discover some sampling point where we could be certain that a worker, who knew about the retraining program had actually rejected this as an appropriate course of action for himself. While not discarding the first alternative outright - that of sampling the ranks of the unemployed - it seemed that the second approach might prove more productive. Accordingly we undertook a systems analysis of the process whereby individuals in the labour force became students within the retraining program.

2. A systems analysis of the retraining program was begun in January, 1967, and it is safe to say that the effort devoted to it set the project back about nine months. It set us back, not because it was unproductive, nor because it produced misleading data, but because it brought to light the nature of the process of becoming a trainee as seen from the point of view of both those who administer the program, and those who might be candidates for retraining. The legislation and funding of the program are primarily Federal; the selection of the students is carried out at Canadian Manpower

Centres (equivalent to NES offices); the training is under the supervision of the Provincial Departments of Education, and classes are actually conducted by municipal school boards - in the case of our study area, by the Toronto Board of Education.

On April 1, 1967, three months after our study began, the legislation was changed and the requirements for entry to the program and eligibility for training allowances changed as well. Despite these perturbations in the system, it is precisely because were were actively engaged in trying to understand and conceptualize the system in detail that we were able to isolate some of the sampling points which promised to be productive.

The statement that we were set back by virtue of the system's approach should really be taken to mean that we became cognizant of many factors affecting the adults in the program which might otherwise have escaped us. The result is that our study has never really entered the classroom to date, although this phase is about to begin and approval from all of the necessary bodies has been acquired.

3. Two basic sampling points for this portion of the study were identified. The first of these occurs when an applicant to a Canada Manpower Centre rejects the suggestion that he consider retraining. An applicant to a Canada Manpower Centre is one who is actively seeking work. Not all of these workers are eligible for retraining - to be so they must be at

least one year older than the average school-leaving age in the province in which he resides. In the case of Ontario this age is 16. However, before the individual is recommended for retraining the counsellor must be assured that the individual's opportunities for gainful employment would definitely be improved by the course of training sought, or whose degree of skill would be increased. The identification of such individuals is complicated by the fact that financial assistance may be provided for some, and it is incumbent on the counsellor to assure himself that retraining is not being sought as an alternative for gainful - although temporary - employment or unemployment insurance. Under the Act an adult is eligible for a training allowance if he has been a member of the labour force substantially without interruption for not less than three years; or if he has one or more persons wholly or substantially dependent upon him for support. The allowance is not large, ranging from $35 per week to a maximum of around $90. Thus, only some of the many persons actively seeking work would qualify for retraining or an allowance even though they might express an interest. Our first sample was defined as refusers - those who were eligible for retraining, who discussed retraining with a counsellor but who rejected or refused to proceed beyond that point.

Our second sample came from those who were eligible for retraining, who had accepted the suggestion that they become involved in the program, who had been duly documented and tested within the Canada Manpower Centre, who had presented themselves at the input stage to the actual courses -

that is, the Adult Education Counselling Centre of the Toronto Board of Education - but who failed to appear when they received their call-up letter. This second sample, who appear to have been at least well enough motivated to interact with the system up to the threshold of retraining, constituted our No-show sample.

At this point our study split into two sub-studies, one for each of the samples described, but the basic methodology was the same for each.

- Manpower or the Counselling Centre tagged the files of those who either rejected or who failed to show for the program;
- Attempts were then made to locate and interview these individuals at their place of residence.
- The interviews were conducted by experienced field staff of a large international survey and market research firm.
- A separate interview schedule was developed for each sample, and wherever possible the interview was conducted in the respondents' native language - either by the interviewer, one of his or her assistants, or through the aid of a local or family interpreter. By the end of the study such interviews (averaging 45 minutes each) had been conducted in English, Italian, Greek, and Macedonian, with the actual subject of the interview speaking one of these or Chinese, French, German, Portugese, or other languages.

While we had no intention of doing so, our cost per completed interview probably exceeded the most expensive psychotherapy sessions available. Part of this was caused by the need to have bilingual interviewers, but a far greater cost was the difficulty of contacting the subjects once they

had been identified, a factor which will be discussed shortly.

4. The results of the study must first be considered from the two samples separately:

The "refuser" sample is ridiculously small, and numbers only 27 completed interviews, despite the fact that we had been supplied with a total of 86 names collected over a six-week period from various Manpower offices throughout the Metro area. Of these, 17 simply could not be contacted after exhausting all known resources; 10 had moved with no forwarding address; 3 had left the city; 7 refused to be interviewed and 21 could neither arrange nor keep an appointment with the interviewer.

(i) Of the 27 individuals actually contacted, the first interesting finding was that five of them denied having discussed retraining with Manpower personnel. This can be interpreted to mean either that the tagging of the files was in error, or that there is a defensive attitude adopted by those who opt out of a system which is designed to assist them. One might invoke several clinical labels to describe this behavior but further interviewing of a larger sample would obviously be needed to establish this as anything more than a chance occurrence.

(ii) Our second observation was that of the 22 respondents who agreed that

they had discussed retraining possibilities, 18 of them (82%) claimed they would still like to take a course. This is clearly not what we expected on the basis of our sample definition.

(iii)Responses to other questions indicated that about a third of the group had elected to continue to seek work rather than attempt to live on the minimal allowance, or enroll in classes without an allowance; while about 25% of the group claimed to be waiting until the fall of 1967 when a new set of courses were to begin.

A brief summary of these results would seem to be that once retraining possibilities are discussed with an unemployed adult, and he becomes aware of their potential then the majority appear positively disposed towards future involvement in such a program. This does not mean that they will become involved, our data are too meager nor have we been able to conduct the follow-up necessary to test this hypothesis. But, if we massage the data hard enough, then it would seem that the critical factors for our sample were that the course be made available as soon as possible after the basic concept of retraining was discussed formally and that a sufficient amount of money be available to compete with other possible job opportunities. Another way of achieving the same result would be to make the anticipated rewards of increased skill strong enough that the unemployed adult would be willing to forego an adequate wage and job in the present - and that is a motivational problem for which we see no easy solution.

The "no-show" sample proved to be somewhat more encouraging than the "refusers". From a total of 107 names collected at the Adult Education Counselling Centre, it was possible to interview 46 individuals. While this is a higher percentage than in the "refuser" sample the costs of successfully interviewing only 43% of a group when it is spread throughout a large urban area make this type survey research extremely difficult to justify unless a maximum amount of interpretable and relevant data can be obtained from each respondent.

(i) One of our first observations was that those whom we were able to interview differed in at least one noticeable characteristic from those not interviewed: namely, they tended to be less mobile. The group whom we were unable to contact contained 28% who simply could not be traced; during the course of trying to set up interviews we lost contact with 4 of the potential sample; and at least 9 from our original list left Toronto before the interviewers reached them by phone. Another factor which appears to differentiate these two groups is their choice of occupational goals, recorded at the time of their interview with the Manpower Counsellor. The 107 members of the group as a whole cited 33 different occupations with multiple-mentions for many of these. Of interest here is that only 7 occupations were listed as common goals by both sub-groups, while each named a set of 13 jobs not noted by the other group. Just how much new information was lost from this sub-group of highly mobile individuals is not known, but the fact that they outnumbered our respondents should not be over-looked.

(ii) When questioned directly about their motivation for originally becoming involved in the process leading to retraining, very few of the respondents explicitly referred to a desire for higher income;

(iii)In general the respondents see additional education as an assurance of regular employment or employment in more desirable occupational areas, (although it is somewhat sobering to note that with respect to area of residence only half indicated that they would be willing to move from the city if a job were made available to them elsewhere);

(iv) References to a desire for training in skills which were in demand by employers were virtually absent from the respondents' answers;

(v) Reasons given for not actually appearing for their formal induction into the training program are extremely varied but may be summarized quite simply - poor communication between the applicants and the officials administering the system.

- In some instances the communication breakdown is the result of language difficulty. Many of the applicants did not understand English and there are no translation services available for the counsellors;
- In other instances the applicant fails to understand systems and regulations and the financial arrangements; or

- The applicant simply may be unable to arrange such matters as transportation, baby sitters, or for the care for their families when courses became available at short notice.

In sum the adults in our sample who failed to appear for their retraining course do not appear to have lost their original motivation. In some cases the amount of the training allowance was judged to be insufficient to carry through with the intent, while in many other cases long time delays between acceptance as a potential student and notice of actual commencement of classes put too great a strain on the resources - both personal and financial - of the candidate.

5. Conclusions to this study have already been suggested. The adults in our samples indicate that once the process of induction into a retraining program is begun it must proceed quickly and that adequate support must be provided so that the candidate does not suffer economically. As a corollary to this we propose to recommend that the government agencies concerned with publicity for retraining do nothing to increase public awareness and demand for such programs until the administrative systems required for the smooth and efficient transformation of workers into students have been more adequately designed and staffed.

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